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SUBJECT: KARZAI COMMENTS ON COUNTER NARCOTICS POLICY

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶1. (S) Ambassador Neumann met with President Karzai and discussed the Afghanistan counter-narcotics strategy. Karzai is vehemently against aerial spraying saying that we would eliminate poppy for one year at the price of turning Afghans permanently against GOA and putting large numbers into the hands of the Taliban. He thinks eradication in Helmand will be next to impossible this year; the government must first establish authority and security conditions have moved this a long way backwards from last year. Comment: By contrast, the Governor of Helmand believes substantial eradication could be done (septel to follow). We will be working on Karzai. End Comment.

¶2. (S) Karzai thinks boosting economic assistance should focus heavily on the non- or low- producing provinces. He believes giving economic assistance only to the poppy producing provinces will further alienate other parts of Afghanistan and cause new instability. Karzai was slightly receptive to the idea of enhanced eradication in provinces other than Helmand but came back also to the need for building up government authority. Badakhshan, for example, he characterized as a province dominated by war lords and poverty in which the writ of the GOA scarcely runs. Eradication there would destabilize things but not help until the GOA is able to expand its overall authority. Comment: He is right about the lack of GOA presence. There are no regular ANP or ANA there as the Badakhshan governor has frequently complained, most recently to the Ambassador two weeks ago. The ANP there are in fact all under control of various commanders, most the appointees of Rabbani. The force generation needs in the south and east preclude any immediate assignment of out-of-province security forces. End comment.

¶3. (S) Karzai said the problem is not the pillars of the counter narcotics strategy but that the State does not yet exist to implement them in most parts of the country. Karzai nevertheless accepted that eradication must go forward where it is possible. He noted also that the UK has raised with him in a general way the idea of an amnesty to get large traffickers out of the drug business and invest their ill gotten gains in productive investments in their localities. He was uncertain about his reaction to the idea. The Ambassador stressed that any proposal had to be looked at very closely to avoid the possibility that people could use the amnesty to protect themselves while staying in the drug business. The Ambassador noted the bad experience we had had with a similar concept in Colombia. Karzai said the bottom line was whether such a proposal could help reduce fighting and undermine the Taliban; if so it would have merit. Throughout the discussion he was more focused on the implications of the growing insurgency and weakness of the GOA than on counter narcotics policy per se.

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